

# Spirit within him wins

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for the master's final exams after joining Sarker and Brothers, an agent of Nestlé Bangladesh Ltd, as a distribution sales representative on April 4 last year.

On the fateful day, he went to his office, which was just beside Rana Plaza, at 8:00am. An hour later he found himself trapped amid rubble as Rana Plaza pinned a part of the adjacent building to the ground. His right hand and both legs were stuck under the rubble.

"I prayed to the Almighty. I cried for a while thinking whether I would have to live the rest of my life as a crippled man," Laskar said.

Within two hours of the incident, rescuers freed him and rushed him to Enam Medical College and Hospital in Savar.

Four days later, he was transferred to Apollo Hospitals where his right hand was amputated from below the elbow as infection spread. He received full treatment under the hospital's fund.

Laskar also received more than three dozen stitches in his ears and on his head.

Released from the hospital, he went to the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP) for physiotherapy and returned to Apollo Hospitals on June 15 to have the big toe of his right leg operated on.

"This was the time when my younger

brother reminded me of my master's exams. Although I could not study in the last two months I told him that I would take the exams if they [family members] could take me to the exam hall."

With the help of Bithi Ghosh, a lecturer of Shaikh Borhanuddin College in Dhaka, he got permission from the authorities of National University to take the help of the proxy writer in the exams.

A week after the surgery when he was still undergoing therapy at the CRP, he sat for the exams.

He has to continue with physiotherapy to get the toe, whose tendons were damaged in the incident, functional so that he can walk again.

The recovery will be a long-term process, Laskar said.

He received Tk 12 lakh in the form of fixed deposit with Sonali Bank from the Prime Minister's Fund. He also got financial support from individuals and private entities.

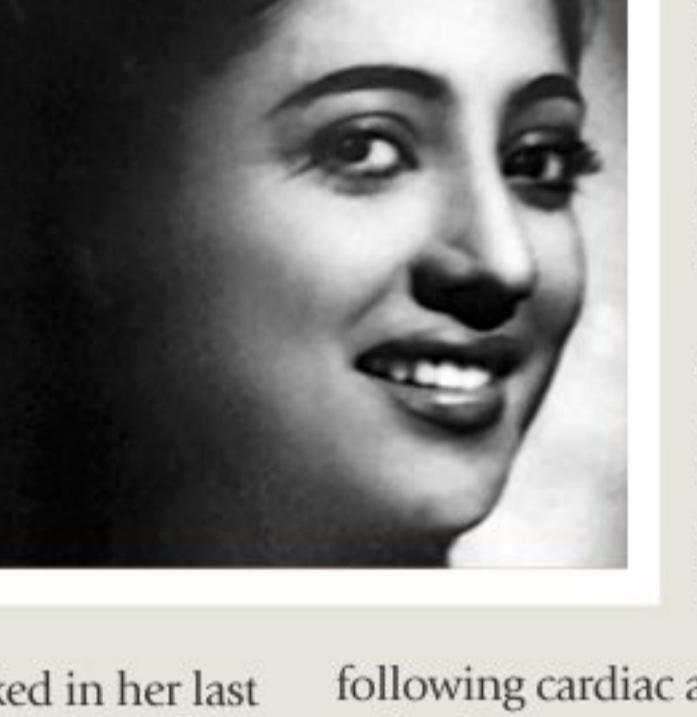
Laskar, who aims to be a banker, thanks everybody for helping him so far.

Now all he desires to have is a prosthetic hand that will enable him to work and lead a life with dignity, without being dependent on others.

"It upsets me when I think that I don't have a hand. I think I will be able to forget the tragic incident if my hand is replaced."

# Enigma, even in her death

AGENCIES



Greta Garbo was born on September 1905 and died in 1990 at the age of 84. But for almost half a century before that, she was a recluse, choosing her life in seclusion as she famously remarked once - "I want to be let alone." She shot into fame in the 1920s and 1930s, never got married, yet linked to many men of her times.

The reference of Garbo always resurfaces whenever one thinks of India's own answer to her, Suchitra Sen.

It will forever remain a secret how reclusive actress Suchitra Sen, who was hardly seen in public in the last 35 years, looked in her last days.

Suchitra Sen had to pay quite the price for her unique self-exile spanning over 30 years. In 2005, she was offered the Dadasaheb Phalke award with the rider that she would accept it in person. She declined.

It couldn't have been an easy decision for somebody who spent 30 years of her life facing the camera — rising steadily from an "extra" to the "glamour queen" of the

industry.

Priya Ranjan Dasmuni, the then Information and Broadcasting Minister, insisted that she accept the award, earlier conferred on such legendary actors as Devika Rani and Kanan Devi. But Suchitra Sen preferred the enigma of invisibility over the most coveted of all Indian film awards.

Much like her life after movies, the final journey of the legendary actress too was a quiet affair with the administration taking measures honouring her wish of keeping her face away from public gaze.

The body of Sen, who died yesterday following cardiac arrest at a city nursing home, was carried to her Ballygunge residence in a coffin inside a hearse fitted with dark glasses and covered with floral wreaths.

The Mahanayika remained virtually invisible to the public during the entire process.

Hundreds of fans gathered around the medical facility hoping to get a glimpse of the screen-goddess. But only a chosen few — including West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee could pay their last respects.

# Lost dynasty

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1901-1902, a British team, led by the famous Egyptologist, Flinders Petrie, entered four of the tombs — but had no idea as to who they belonged to or even of their high-status.

Almost a century later, in 1997, a Danish Egyptologist, Dr Kim Ryholt, deduced from a highly damaged ancient Egyptian papyrus, that a lost dynasty should theoretically have existed at Abydos between 1650 BC and 1600 BC.

But there was no proof until the last few weeks when a team of American Egyptologists discovered a previously unknown tomb buried under three metres of sand.

They deciphered a painted inscription which revealed the name and titles of an unknown pharaoh. The previously unknown ancient Egyptian ruler's name was Senebkay.

The tomb's contents had been badly damaged by tomb robbers more than 2,000 years ago, but the American Egyptologists, from the University of Pennsylvania, succeeded in piecing together the lost pharaoh's physical remains.

The pharaoh was 1.75 metres tall and died aged around 50 of unknown causes.

The American excavators had been able to deduce that Senebkay was either the first or the second pharaoh in the lost dynasty.

Now, using geophysical equipment to 'x-ray' the ground, the team is hoping to discover more royal tombs from the lost dynasty.

# In beauty, in grace

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the meaning came to her as it did to millions of people in the subcontinent. Partition pushed her and her family into what had become the Indian state of West Bengal in the aftermath of a conflict that left tens of thousands dead and millions maimed, in the political sense, for life.

Roma, as we have been made to understand, became Suchitra when Nitish Roy, an assistant to film director Sukumar Dasgupta, decided on the sets of the movie Roma played a character in that her beauty called for a more lyrical name. And voila! Suchitra Sen was born.

She and the world would never be the same again, for she would bring a magical quality to Bengali movies in a way no one else could or would. As for the world, it was made aware of the profundity of beauty that could define a Bengali woman, of the self-esteem that could be the bedrock on which a career could be built.

That career, for Suchitra Sen, was intricately wrapped around filmdom. She took it as a bird takes to the expansive blue yonder. She was a daughter-in-law; she was the mother of a baby daughter. It was a period in life when women, especially Bengali young women, begin weaving the patterns of a life-to-be in the closeness of family and home. For Suchitra, the journey would be different. She branched out of the home, to find a larger home in the world of movies. And thus it was that she gave herself to the world, through such defining movies as Harano Sur, Saptapadi and Jibon Trishna. In most of her roles, if not all, she was the modern Indian woman. Or you could say she played roles that epitomised the modern Bengali woman. She could be a doctor or an artist. Or she could be a silent lover, unable to articulate her feelings for the object of her desire except through song. Your ideas of romance acquire a fresh lilt when you see Uttam Kumar stop in his tracks as Suchitra breaks into tumi na ahoy rohite kachhe. Poetry suffuses the song. The song kindles fire in the soul.

With Uttam Kumar, as destiny would have you know, Suchitra Sen was linked for life. It was a bonding that gave the Bengali cinegoer what Maitreyee Chowdhury would call Bengali cinema's first couple. But then, you raise the old question: would Uttam reach the heights had Suchitra not come along? Think back on Sharhe Chuattor, on Ora Thakey Odhare. With a good number of

flops behind him, with little of luminosity ahead, the future Mahanayak was in desperate straits. Suchitra Sen's arrival made a change. Our world of magic realism, even before that term came to be invented and without perhaps the same connotation, went through a transformation. Suchitra Sen and Uttam Kumar were now emblems of high romance. The bonding became, in a curious way, a bondage that militated against a separation. Tales of love would now need to approximate the Uttam-Suchitra romance if they were to be taken seriously.

Suchitra Sen's beauty came tempered by a degree of hauteur unmatched in our part of the world. For Bengali women everywhere, she was the perfect model for life to be built around. And men's eyes brightened in long-forgotten dreams, even when she had gone into seclusion, at the very mention of her name. Unlike other artistes who grew old in full glare of the world, their wrinkles keeping pace with passing time, Suchitra remained defiant in her determination not to let the world in on her progression in years. It was just as well, for she was that image of sensuous charm and murderous charisma, underpinned by an intelligent mind, one would rather keep framed in the contours of youth than let it wither through the battering of time.

On the day Uttam Kumar died in July 1980, it has been said, Suchitra Sen went to see his corpse deep in the night. She placed her palm on his cold forehead, stayed for sometime and then went away. She was fulfilling a wish, Uttam's, that she touch his forehead. She did not oblige him in life. She was making amends after his death. At a point early in this century, she was admitted to hospital for treatment. Her bed, as the grapevine had it at the time, was only two beds removed from the one on which Uttam Kumar's life had drawn to an end.

Sightings of Suchitra Sen in the final decades of her life have never been verified. Her privacy was not to be tampered with. Her life was not to be a theme of public deliberations. She would be in control of it. And she was, right till the end.

No tribute to Suchitra Sen can be greater than that coming from that larger-than-life thespian Dilip Kumar. "For the first time," said he once, "in her, I came across an ideal blend of beauty and brains in a single woman. She is extraordinary."

(Suchitra Sen, born on 6 April 1931 in Pabna, died on 17 January 2014 in Kolkata)

# Cold hits infants

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child health department of the CMCH, said children below five years old faced risks of contracting different diseases in extreme cold. Fifty children were admitted to the hospital on Thursday, with half of them having either pneumonia or diarrhoea, he added.

An increased inflow of children suffering from similar complications has been reported in Chattogram Ma O Shishu General Hospital.

Dr Mahmud A Chowdhury Arju, professor of paediatrics at the hospital, said, "We have 250 beds in the Child Health Ward which has been outnumbered by patients. So we had to accommodate them in less-busy wards like the eye and ear, nose and throat (ENT)." On Thursday, the hospital had 265 admitted patients.

He cautioned parents against Rota virus and advised that

mothers must breastfeed their babies. "It'll help create antibodies in the body of the infant," he said, adding that parents should consult doctors if their babies start suffering from breathing problems.

The scenes at private clinics were not different either. CMCH paediatrician Dr Pranab said most of the patients he had treated over more than a week reported cold related problems.

Dr Rezaul Karim, head of the child health department at the CMCH, said malnourished children were more vulnerable to diseases like pneumonia.

Against the backdrop of the recent rush of patients to hospitals, he stressed the need for introducing more facilities, an ICU at the child ward in particular, for treating critical patients.

For lack of an intensive care unit, the hospital cannot deliver

proper services to many children. In such cases, patients go to



Suchitra's Gopalpur home in Pabna occupied and turned into a school by Jamaat-backed institution Imam Gazzali Institute.

PHOTO: STAR

# Her home

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Interestingly, it was the district administration that had leased out Suchitra's home to Imam Gazzali Institute in 1987 for just one year.

Suchitra was born on April 6, 1931, at her grandfather's home at Vangabari of Beluchi upazila of then greater Pabna, but her first home was in Gopalpur, her father Karunamoy Dasgupta's house.

Named Roma Dasgupta, she grew up in the small district town and went to school way into her teens.

From her Gopalpur home, she went to her first school, Mahakali Pathshala, in the town and then to Pabna Girls School, now named Pabna Govt Girls High School, where she studied until class-IX.

Her family moved to Kolkata a few months after India and Pakistan were born ending the British era. But next to no evidence remains of this glamorous person in Pabna.

# Target expat

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of kidnapers. Each gang consists of around 10 to 15 members. The gangs are operating mainly in the Mideast, using sea routes," Shah Alam, additional deputy inspector general of the CID, told The Daily Star.

The gangs use their local agents for financial transactions, he said.

The local agents collect the ransom from the victims' families through bKash mobile money transfer system, courier services, bank accounts and even direct cash transactions.

Two bKash agents have already been arrested for their involvement with the gangs and the CID is now hunting for the gang kingpins.

However, not many victims are released even after their families manage to pay the ransom. Most of the time, the kidnapers do not let them walk away out of fear that the victims, once freed, might expose them to police.

"Once a gang receives the ransom for a victim, it sells him to another group," the CID official claimed.

The claim somewhat corroborates what some of the 29 returnees from Iran have said.

"I witnessed the death of two Bangladeshis at the hands of them [abductors]. They were killed through brutal tortures," said Parvez Rana, who too had suffered immense ordeals during his nine-month captivity at Iran's Bandar Abbas.

"I could not sleep for many nights. Even when they allowed us to sleep, it was not possible to sleep for more than three hours. They would wake us up in the middle of the night and start torturing us so that we asked our families in Bangladesh to pay the ransom," Rana told The Daily Star.

The gang always used sea routes for transporting the kidnapped workers to avoid detection, said Anwar Hossain, another returnee.

The camps, where the workers were kept captive, were highly secured, making it almost impossible for the inmates to flee.

"Everything we did, including sleeping, eating and bathing, were done on their command and under their watch," he said.

"I begged for my release, saying my parents were not capable of paying the ransom. But they were too heartless to listen to my cries," Anwar added.

The CID has collected the documents that the escapees managed to steal from the kidnapers when they made it out.

The documents include some log books containing transaction details and intra-gang contacts which the CID is now scrutinising for further leads.

The CID said they were also trying to repatriate the six members of the gangs arrested in Iran and Greece.

When asked about the total number of workers kidnapped by the gangs, Shah Alam said they did not know the exact number but quite a good number of Bangladeshis were feared to have fallen victims to the gangs.

# Law under scrutiny

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Since the beginning of the long-awaited trial around four years ago, different quarters have been demanding that the government enact a law to protect the witnesses and the people involved in the trial, but to no avail.

The demand grew stronger after a prosecution witness had been killed and attacks made on several other witnesses and houses of judges and prosecutors in the last few months.

Mostafa Hawlader, a witness in the case against Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delawar Hossain Sayeedee, was hacked in his Pirojpur home on December 8 last year. He succumbed to his injuries at Dhaka Medical College Hospital two days later.

Houses of two other prosecution witnesses — Mahabubul Alam of Pirojpur and Ranjit Kumar Nath of Faridpur — also came under attack on October 28 and December 15 respectively.

Besides, village homes of justices SK Sinha, ATM Fazle Kabir and Jahangir Hossain and Chief Prosecutor Ghulam Arief Tipoo and Tureen Afroz came under attack during opposition enforced block-

# Islamists, cops clash

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The government hoped a large turnout among Egypt's 53 million registered voters in the referendum would bolster its democratic credentials and further marginalise the Islamists.

Army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, the man who toppled Morsi, was closely monitoring voter participation as an indication of support for a presidential bid later this year, military officials said.

Preliminary tallies reported by state news agency MENA suggested turnout had reached 39 percent in most provinces in Tuesday and Wednesday's polling, sharply up on 33 percent registered in the Morsi-era referendum just over a year ago.

The office of interim president Adly Mansour hailed a "high turnout" in the vote on a new charter it says gives new protections for free speech and women's rights, but it gave no figures.